DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 450 EC 306 633

AUTHOR	Leckie, Barbara
TITLE	Girls, Bullying Behaviours and Peer Relationships: The Double Edged Sword of Exclusion and Rejection.
PUB DATE	1998-04-00
NOTE	34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education (Brisbane, Australia, November 30-December 4, 1997). Graphs and figures are not available in the ERIC copy.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Age Differences; *Alienation; *Behavior Problems; *Bullying; Females; Foreign Countries; Intermediate Grades; Interpersonal Competence; *Peer Relationship; Secondary Education; Social Development; *Social Isolation; *Student Attitudes; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the outcomes of a study on indirect bullying behaviors in girls and the link between girls' peer relationships and bullying behaviors. The study used self-report and peer nomination instruments to survey 987 Australian girls in individual classes from Year 6 to Year 10 in 7 South Australian Catholic and independent schools, 5 of which were single sex and 2 of which were part of co-educational systems. Results from the study indicate that the girls clearly understood that bullying is about deliberate intent to harm, involves two parties of unequal status power, and is not an isolated incident but occurs repeatedly. Bullying was found to be often psychological, sometimes verbal, and never physical. Verbal behaviors that were identified as bullying included teasing, hassling, name calling, and criticizing others' appearances. The girls perceived the following indirect aggressive behaviors as bullying behaviors: spreading rumors, writing nasty notes, telling bad/false stories, saying bad things behind others' backs, gossiping, shutting others out of the group, and deliberately not inviting others to parties. The study also discusses findings that indicate perceptions on indirect aggressive behavior change when girls are older. (Contains 37 references.) (CR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 460 450

TITLE OF PAPER: Girls, Bullying Behaviours and Peer Relationships: The Double Edged Sword of Exclusion and Rejection

AUTHOR: Barbara Leckie

INSTITUTION: University of South Australia/Flinders University

E-Mail: barbara.leckie@unisa.edu.au

ABSTRACT:

Bullying is recognised to be a reliably identifiable sub-set of children's aggressive behaviour (Dodge, Coie, Pettit and Price, 1990). Whilst little appears to be known directly about girls' bullying behaviours, recent research has shed considerable light upon related fields. Lagerspetz, Bjorqvist and Peltonen, (1988) have revealed that girls use indirect methods of aggression, such as spreading rumours and excluding and ostracising others; and Crick, Bigbee and Howes (1996) report that with relational aggression, girls' peer conflicts increase in frequency and become more common as they move from middle childhood to adolescence. Such socially manipulative strategies are also powerful tools often used by girls to protect and maintain their peer relationships and friendship dyads, which in turn reflect exclusivity, intensity and disclosure. These behaviours appear to serve a dual function: to protect existing friendships from the intrusion of others; and to deliberately harm target girls through rejection and isolation. Surveys which included both self report and peer nomination instruments were administered to girls in individual classes from Year 6 to Year 10 (N = 987) in seven South Australian Catholic and Independent schools, 5 of which were single-sex and 2 were co-educational systems. This paper will explore the apparent dual function of these behaviours and examine the links between girls' peer relationships and bullying behaviours in light of what is known about indirect and relational aggression. Implications for co-operation and conflict management between girls in schools will also be discussed.

RELATIONSHIP TO CONFERENCE THEME: RESEARCHING EDUCATION IN NEW TIMES:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

B. Leckie

EC 306633

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Aggression and bullying in our schools are old problems. However, little is known about girls' bullying behaviours, their perceptions of these behaviours, the impact on the victim or the significance of their friendships in relation to these behaviours. This research builds on what is known and asks new questions relevant to a specific population in our schools who have hitherto been ignored in this field: girls.

Introduction:

Bullying is recognised to be a stable, ongoing, intentional one-way form of violent activity, involving a power relationship between a victim who feels helpless and a perpetrator who has control (Olweus, 1978; Tattum, 1989; Smith, 1991; Slee, 1993; Rigby, 1996). Dodge, Coie, Pettit and Price (1990) suggest that it can therefore be considered to be a reliably identifiable sub type of children's aggression.

Aggressive acts occurring between individuals involve a specific intent to harm, but do not necessarily involve a power differential, nor repeated negativity. These are distinctive characteristics of bullying behaviours. It is therefore important to distinguish between aggressive acts which occur between individuals/groups of equal status/position/power, and bullying, where the victim generally feels that they have less or no power. Acts of aggression can be considered to involve a two-way process of attack and retaliation, whereby each party has a relatively equal stake in the conflict. Bullying, however, describes a one-way attack situation whereby the perpetrator has more power and where the victim rarely retaliates or feels able to.

Whilst the key issues of: intent to harm; repeated and ongoing negativity, and a power imbalance are generally agreed with, bullying has however, been defined and conceptualised in many different ways by

researchers and educators. One of the earliest definitions was put forward by Olweus who suggested that:

A bully is a boy who fairly often oppresses or harasses somebody else; the target may be boys or girls, the harassment physical or mental (Olweus, 1978).

The age groups and gender chosen by Olweus for his early studies in the 1970s reflected his interests in boy aggressors in the pre and pubescent years and set the direction for the international research that followed. Girls were largely ignored in this early bullying research tradition, as their behaviours did not equate with the traditional view of bullying: overt, direct physically aggressive behaviours more usually associated with boys. Girls appear to have been only commented on in passing within the bullying hegemony.

The early reports thus indicated lower levels of girls' involvement in bullying activities, which may have been an outcome of the definitions used, or the overt, predominantly physically aggressive behaviours with which they had to identify in previous research surveys. Thus, only those girls who engaged in overt, physical bullying may have been reported. The more subtle and covert forms of negative, aggressive behaviour were not adequately recognised, identified or explored in these earlier studies.

Girls have, however, more recently been compared to boys in terms of incidence and age differences with regard to bullying. Research into bullying has demonstrated that boys are more likely to be perpetrators and victims of bullying behaviours than are girls (Siann, Callaghan, Glissov, Lockhart and Rawson, 1994; Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 1994). Olweus, (1991) further reported that boys were responsible for the large part of bullying that girls are subjected to.

The gender of the bully and victim would seem of some importance here.

Most of the earlier research concentrated on male:male or male:female bullying. Bullying and gender harassment, however, are not the sole domain of male:male or male:female encounters. Given that there are single-sex schools, where there are no boys present to be either the perpetrator or the victim, any bullying which occurs in these environments must be female:female. The corollary of this then, is that co-educational schools would also have female:female bullying incidents. To date, these behaviours which occur between girls have been easily dismissed as girls "just being bitchy", and have thus been vastly underestimated due to the fact that the main focus of bullying investigations has been predominantly overt bullying.

The negative, aggressive interactions known to occur between girls, and often referred to as "bitchy behaviour", reflect more subtle, relatively invisible acts of aggression. Female:female bullying has not specifically been investigated, however most recently, research in the related field of aggression, has indicated that girls use indirect forms of aggression (Lagerspetz, Bjorqvist and Peltonen, 1988) or relational aggression (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995) when aggressing against each other and that these are distinct characteristics of girls' negative behaviours. In order to understand girls' bullying behaviours more fully, then, it is necessary to understand the larger set of girls' aggressive behaviours. Recent writings in the field of bullying seem to have adopted these indirect and relational forms of aggression as girls' bullying behaviours, without exploring whether girls perceive them to be.

This research aims to assess girls' understanding of the concept and nature of bullying as it relates to them, along with their perceptions of indirect aggressive behaviours as bullying behaviours.

Aggression:

Traditionally, research into aggression has shown that it was considered to be a predominantly male phenomenon, defined generally as behaviours that are intended to harm. Buss (1961) had reported that female aggression was of little import and later studies supported the belief that boys appeared to be more aggressive than girls (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Using predominantly observational techniques, this research found that there were apparent gender differences, with males preferring physical means, whereas females were more likely to adopt verbal methods of aggression (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Block, 1993; Parke and Slaby, 1993).

Feshbach (1969), in one of the earliest studies on the topic of gender differences in aggression observed first graders responses to unfamiliar peers and referred to the girls' responses as "indirect aggression". Recent studies have further indicated that girls are aggressive, but that they use qualitatively different methods of aggression to those used by boys. Lagerspetz, Bjorqvist and Peltonen (1988) identified indirect methods of aggression which are more common to girls, such as spreading rumours, writing nasty notes, excluding and ostracising others. These indirect behaviours are explained as being:

"socially sophisticated strategies of aggression whereby the perpetrator can inflict harm on a target without being identified (Bjorqvist, 1994, p179)".

Lagerspetz et al (1988) further suggested that girls' tighter social structure made it easier for them to exploit relationships and manipulate and harm others in these indirect ways. Bjorqvist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (1992) referred to a type of

"social manipulation, whereby the aggressor makes use of the social structure available to harm the target girl (p52)".

Whereas boys have been found to always be more physically aggressive than girls, and both boys and girls have been found to engage in verbal

aggression to a similar extent, Lagerspetz, Bjorqvist and Peltonen (1988) and Owens (1995) found that girls appear to adopt more indirect methods as they get older.

Most recently, relational aggression (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995) has been presented as being a form of aggression more typical of girls which, like the work of Lagerspetz et al (1988) suggests that girls may not be inherently less aggressive than boys, but instead express their aggression differently. Defined as:

harming others through purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships (p 711)

relational aggression is concerned with such behaviours as: purposefully withdrawing friendship or acceptance in order to control or hurt the child; spreading rumours so that peers will reject her; angry retaliation by excluding her from the play group (p711).

Further studies (Crick, Bigbee and Howes, 1996) assessed whether children viewed relationally manipulative behaviours as "aggressive" and found that relational aggression and verbal insults were the most frequently cited harmful behaviours for girls. One reason that is suggested for girls using relational aggression rather than overt aggression, is because relationally aggressive behaviours damage goals which are particularly important for girls (p 1003) and consequently serve as effective means of gaining control or retaliating against another girl.

Both indirect and relational aggression view the social structure as the vehicle for these negative behaviours, due to the nature of girls' peer relationships and friendships. Whilst little research has been specifically conducted into girls' bullying behaviours, the current research into the broader field of aggression: indirect and relational aggression, sheds considerable light onto this field. The assumption

has been made, however, that these behaviours, because they are predominantly found occurring amongst girls, are girls' bullying behaviours

How girls themselves perceive these aggressive behaviours is of import. If they consider them to be bullying behaviours, then they are indicating that they represent not only an intent to harm, but they fulfil the requirements of that sub-set of aggression: bullying: which involves a power imbalance and is repeated over time. Girls would thus be suggesting that these activities are one-way attacks, designed to harm, where the perpetrator has power and control and the victim feels helpless and powerless.

If they do not perceive them to be bullying, but do, as previous research has already shown, perceive them to be aggressive, then girls are indicating that these behaviours occur between parties of equal strength/status/power and thus are part of the two-way attack and retaliation process. As such, they may be part of the social repertoire that girls have available to them to assist with the ebb and flow of their friendships and relationships.

Friendship, Language, Acceptance and Rejection:

Since girls' aggressive behaviours appear to use the friendship and peer relationship structure as a vehicle, it is of importance to examine the nature of girls' friendships.

Research suggests that girls appear to have distinctive friendship patterns that revolve around shifting, dyadic alliances which are jealously guarded and reflect the notions of exclusivity, intensity, intimacy and disclosure (Eder and Hallinan, 1978: cited in Adler, Kless and Adler, 1992; Maccoby, 1990; Erwin, 1993; Thorne, 1993). These fewer, but stronger friendships are suggested to contribute to girls

having better social skills, greater emotional intimacy and ease of self-disclosure than do boys (Eder and Hallinan, 1978).

Traditionally, friendships are regarded as positive experiences for children and are socially, cognitively and developmentally significant (Bukowski, Hoza and Boivin, 1993; Parker and Asher, 1987; Parker and Asher, 1993). The corollary of this then, is that girls who are not accepted into friendships or the peer group, or who are rejected from them, will suffer and be at risk for concurrent and long term maladjustment (Kupersmidt, Coie and Dodge, 1990; Parker and Asher, 1987).

Communication between girls then, appears to be a central aspect of their relationships. What is said, by whom, to whom and about whom appears to assume increasing significance as budding friendships develop, and girls' level of trust, loyalty and disclosure increases. Once this bonding occurs, the relationship becomes something to be jealously guarded and to be protected, which leaves the way open for aggressive interactions between girls to occur when others try to interfere in their relationships, take friends away, or cause these relationships to falter.

Maltz and Borker (1983: cited in Maccoby 1990) report that among girls, language is used as a social process, to either bind friendships, or to reject others. Sheldon also found that when girls talk, they appear to have a double agenda: to be "nice" and appear to sustain social relationships, while at the same time are working to achieve their own individual ends (1989: cited in Maccoby, 1990). This double agenda then, raises questions of manipulation and intent: two of the key factors in girls' aggressive behaviours.

Girls, then, use language more subtlely, manipulatively and indirectly than boys, who have been found to use language more directively: to command, threat or boast. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) suggest that girls

appear to have a higher level of verbal ability than boys and are generally socialised to avoid overt, physically aggressive behaviours. This may facilitate language being used as the central, manipulative tool that serves to maintain, destroy or generally control relationships in indirect ways. Bjorqvist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (1992) suggest that when verbal skills develop, a rich amount of possibilities for the expression of aggression is facilitated, thus enabling girls to not have to resort to physical force (p 60). They further posit that as social intelligence develops, so too does indirect aggression. Rather than using overt, direct forms of aggression and control, girls, with their higher level of verbal ability and socialisation to avoid these behaviours, have developed sharp tongues instead!

For the most part, girls' friendships represent positive and rewarding experiences for those involved. Within this largely positive framework, however, is a web of social complexity and manipulation that is predominantly negative, not readily seen and is only just beginning to be explored and understood by researchers. This negativity appears to be part of the social fabric of girls' friendships and their peer relationships as they go about accepting or rejecting others in the peer group.

The negative interactions that occur between girls have often been referred to as "bitchy behaviours" and are consequently often trivialised and dismissed by parents and teachers without considering the purpose, the impact or the ongoing effect on the target girl. If, as it is now recognised that these behaviours form part of the aggressive repertoire that girls have available to them, then they need to be taken more seriously. Should girls perceive that these behaviours are bullying, however, then they take on the mantle of being somewhat more sinister than either mere bitchiness or outright aggression.

This paper will report on girls' understanding of the concept of bullying and their perceptions of indirect aggressive behaviours as

bullying behaviours, within the context of the nature of girls' relationships.

Method:

Subjects:

Surveys which included both self-report and peer nomination instruments were administered to girls in individual classes randomly drawn from Year 6 to Year 10 (N = 987) in seven South Australian Catholic and Independent schools, 5 of which were single-sex and 2 were coeducational systems. The schools were drawn from across Adelaide, providing a socioeconomic and structural cross section. There was no attempt to match schools due to the number of the variables involved. A survey questionnaire was administered by the researcher, and the data was collected between July and September (Term III) by which time the girls had spent at least six months together. The sample was composed of: 160 year 6 (Mean age 10.9); 162 year 7 (Mean age 11.9); 148 year 8 (Mean age 12.9); 184 year 9 (Mean age 13.9); and 148 year 10 (Mean age 14.9) girls. The mean age for the entire sample was 12.9 years.

Survey Instruments:

The survey booklet contained six sections, providing both quantitative and qualitative data which explored the following:

A: Sociometric Status and Friendship: Is the Child Liked? (Coie, J.D., Dodge, K.A. & and Coppotelli, H. ,1982; Asher, S.R. & Dodge, K.A., 1986)

B: Revised Class Play (Masten, A.S., Morison, P and Pelligrini, D.S., 1985) What is the Child Like?

C: General Demographics

D: Modified Peer Relations Questionnaire (PRQ)(Rigby, K., and Slee, P.T. ,1995)

E: Modified Direct and Indirect Aggressive Behaviour Scale (DAIS)

(Bjorqvist, K. Lagerspetz, K.M.J. & Osterman, K., 1992)

F: Type of Language Used By Girls

This paper will only address certain aspects of the research undertaken using the Modified Peer Relations Questionnaire and the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale (DAIS)

Modified PRQ:

Selected questions from this instrument, which was designed by Rigby and Slee (1995) to reveal information about a student's bullying/victim experiences at school developed, were included.

Validity:

Inter-correlations of the scores from the different measures of peer-victimisation, for both boys and girls have been reported as highly significant ($p<.001$, Rigby and Slee, 1995, p 4). Correlations between peer nomination and self-reports also reveal significance ($p<.001$), with correlations tending to be greater for boys and physical bullying.

Reliability:

Cronbach alphas for the Victim scale are reported to be greater than .75 for both boys and girls (p4) implying a level of acceptable reliability.

To assess the girls' understanding of the concept of bullying in general, this study, unlike previous research, did not give the girls a definition of bullying. Rather, it presented them with the key components of several definitions: Power imbalance; intent to harm; and ongoing over time and asked them to indicate on a four point scale ranging from 1=never to 4=always, which aspects they most agreed with:

- Bullying involves a more powerful student against a weaker student
- Bullying is when someone harms another student on purpose
- Bullying occurs repeatedly and goes on over time

To assess girls' understanding of the nature of girls' bullying, girls

were asked to use the same scale (1=never to 4=always) to determine which activities they perceived bullying amongst girls to involve:

- Bullying is a physical act
- Bullying is a verbal act
- Bullying inflicts mental hurt on another student (psychological)

Modified DAIS:

Based on the items used by Bjorqvist, Lagerspetz and Ostermann (1992), this instrument consisting of 22 different behaviours, is specifically designed to elicit girls' experiences and perceptions of indirect aggressive behaviours. Girls in this survey were asked to indicate whether or not they perceived them to be bullying behaviours and to also indicate on a three-point scale, how often they had been victims (victim self-report) of these behaviours that year.

Validity:

The original instrument developed by Bjorqvist et al (1992) over several studies with subjects of different age groups has revealed through factor analysis, three scales which reflect different types of aggression: direct physical; direct verbal and indirect aggressive behaviours. Owens and MacMullin (1995) report that in their study, all items loaded satisfactorily onto the principal factor (p25) and support the precept that the items are valid measures of each scale.

Reliability:

Scales are reported to have high levels of internal consistency (Bjorqvist et al, 1992) and Cronbach alphas ranging from .80 to .94 are revealed. Owens and MacMullin (1995, p 25) report Kaiser-Caffrey alpha reliability coefficients ranged from .78 to .96. The modified items of indirect aggressive behaviours used in this survey presented a reliability coefficient of .92.

Results

Bullying

Girls' Understanding of Bullying:

Mean responses from all girls: Years 6 to 10; report that their understanding of the concept of bullying does support previous research. Using a four point scale: 1=never; 2=sometimes; 3=often; and 4= always: girls perceive that bullying amongst girls:

* often involves a deliberate intent to harm (Mean response: 3.2);
* often involves a power imbalance (Mean response 3.0) and is
* often repeated and ongoing over time (Mean response 2.7) (see figure 1).

There is a lovely graph missing from here due to .txt format: Just imagine it from the Mean responses of: 3.2 (Intent); 3.0 (power) and 2.7 (repeated)!!! This and the other graphs appear in the printed copy of the paper.

Further analyses were conducted to ascertain whether girls from the primary school years (6 & 7) differed from girls in the secondary school years (8,9 & 10) in their understanding of the concept of bullying. There were no differences found between the systems for each of the three concepts indicating that girls in both primary and secondary schools equally understand the concept of bullying (see figure 2).

Another lovely graph is missing which demonstrated this point!

Girls' Understanding of the Nature of Girls' Bullying (Figure 3)

Mean responses from all girls: Years 6 to 10; report that their understanding of the nature of bullying does support previous research. Using a four point scale: 1=never; 2=sometimes; 3=often; and 4= always: girls perceive that the nature of girls' bullying is:

* never physical (mean response 1.3)
* sometimes/often verbal (mean response 2.7) and
* often psychological (mean response 3.1)

These findings appear to reflect current research which reports that boys more often engage in physical acts of bullying, and that girls are more likely to use psychological means.

Another lovely graph is missing!

Further analysis explored the difference between primary and secondary students in their understanding of the nature of bullying behaviours, and found that for each of the three aspects: physical, verbal and psychological, there was no significant difference between primary or secondary students in their perceptions (see figure 4).

The last graph which is missing!!

Modified DIAS

Given that girls had established that their understanding of the concept of bullying reflects previous research, analyses were then conducted to assess their perceptions of the items on the Direct and Indirect Aggression scale as bullying behaviours.

It was hypothesised that girls would perceive the direct physical, direct verbal and indirect aggressive behaviours to be bullying, given their understanding of the concept and nature of bullying.

Because the data were in the form of percentages, analyses involved chi-square tests when the relation between two variables (Yes/No) was assessed.

Girls' Perceptions Of Direct Physical Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

Chi square analysis reveals that girls very clearly identify that direct physically aggressive behaviours are bullying behaviours, therefore indicating that there is deliberate intent to harm; a power differential between the parties and that it is repeated and ongoing over time (see Table 1).

Table 1

Girls' Perceptions of Direct Physical Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

Behaviour: % Yes Response:Significance

Demanding money or valuables:85.6% yes: Chi Square (1) = 290.92, $p<.0001$

Hitting is bullying:85.0% yes: Chi Square (1) = 282.32, $p<.0001$

Kicking is bullying:83.8% yes: Chi Square (1) = 264.04, $p<.0001$

Punching:83.0% yes: Chi Square (1) = 250.69, $p<.0001$

Pinching:70.3% yes: Chi Square (1) = 94.75, $p<.0001$

Girls' Perceptions of Direct Verbal Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

The analysis reveals that girls also very clearly identify direct verbally aggressive behaviours as bullying behaviours, therefore suggesting that they fulfill the requirements of the definition: repeated, ongoing negativity, deliberately intended to harm, involving a power differential between the parties involved.

Table 2

Girls' Perceptions of Direct Verbal Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

Behaviour: % Yes Response:Significance

Teasing is bullying:85.7% yes: Chi Square (1) = 296.43, p<.0001

Hassling or Bothering Deliberately:84.1% yes: Chi Square (1) = 265.91, p<.0001

Calling Names:77.8% yes: Chi Square (1) = 175.99, p<.0001

Criticising Other's Appearance:71.0% yes: Chi Square (1) = 100.39, p<.0001

Telling Others They Have Germs/Nits/Disease:66.4% yes: Chi Square (1) = 61.46, p<.0001

Girls' Perceptions of Indirect Aggressive Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

These analyses indicate that girls across all ages and year levels perceive most of these indirect aggressive behaviours to be bullying behaviours. Of the ten behaviours presented:

7 were significant in the affirmative:

Spreading Rumours, Chi Square (1) = 87.41, p<.005

Writing Nasty Notes, Chi Square (1) = 66.73, p<.0001

Telling Bad/False Stories, Chi Square (1) = 57.58, p<.0001

Saying Bad Things Behind Backs, Chi Square (1) = 51.93, p<.0001

Gossiping, Chi Square (1) = 15.72, p<.0001

Shutting Out, Chi Square (1) = 9.24, p<.005

Deliberately Not Invite To Parties, Chi Square (1) = 5.54, p=.019

1 was significant in the negative;

Telling Others To Not Be With Certain Girls (Excluding), Chi Square (1) = 14.02, p = .0002

and only 2 were not significant (see Table 3).

These results indicate that girls perceive that 7 of indirect aggressive behaviours are bullying behaviours: spreading rumours; writing nasty notes; telling bad/false stories; saying bad things behind backs; gossiping; shutting out; and deliberately not inviting others to parties and are thus ongoing and repeated over time; involve a power imbalance, and are deliberately intended to harm the target child.

The one behaviour that was significant in the negative: excluding, indicates that girls do not perceive this behaviour to be bullying. That is, they do not perceive that exclusion involves intent to harm, a power imbalance or ongoing negativity.

Table 3

Girls' Perceptions of Indirect Aggressive Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

Behaviour: % Yes Response:Significance

Spreading Rumours:69.5% yes: Chi Square (1) = 87.41, p<.005

Writing Nasty Notes:67.2% yes: Chi Square (1) = 66.73, p<.0001

Telling Bad/False Stories:65.9% yes: Chi Square (1) = 57.58, p<.0001

Saying Bad Things Behind Backs:65.2% yes: Chi Square (1) = 51.93,

p<.0001

Gossiping:58.4% yes: Chi Square (1) = 15.72, p<.0001

Shutting Out:56.3% yes: Chi Square (1) = 9.24, p<.005

Deliberately Not Invite To Parties:55.0 yes: Chi Square (1) = 5.54, p<.05

Revealing Others' Secrets:53.3% yes: Chi Square (1) = 2.53, p=.112

Deliberately Ignoring:50.8% yes: Chi Square (1) = 0.14, p=.707

Telling Others To Not Be With Certain Girls (Excluding):42.1% yes: Chi Square (1) = 14.02, p = .0002

Age Related Changes

Further chi-square analyses were conducted to ascertain whether there were any developmental differences in girls' perceptions that indirect aggressive behaviours are bullying behaviours (see Table 4). Of the seven behaviours previously determined as bullying behaviours across the sample, significant age related differences in girls' perceptions were found in five:

spreading rumours, Chi Square (4) = 16.60, p<.005);
writing nasty notes, Chi Square (4) = 9.88, p <.05;
telling bad/false stories, Chi Square (4) = 14.11, p=.007;
shutting others out, Chi Square (4) =10.12, p<.05;
deliberately ignoring, Chi Square (4) = 9.61, p<.05

These age related trends appear to support previous research which has suggested that there is an increase in bullying around the beginning of secondary school and tapers off over Years 9 and 10. (Rigby, 1996) (see Table 4).

Table 4

Percentage of Girls' Responses to Indirect Aggressive Behaviours Are Bullying

Behaviours By Behaviour Category and Grade

Behaviours:Yr 6:Yr 7:Yr 8:Yr9:Yr 10:Significant for Year Level

Spreading Rumours **:63:66:79:73:66: Chi Square (4) = 16.60, p<.005

Writing Nasty Notes *:64:70:72:66:65: Chi Square (4) = 9.88, p <.05

Talking Behind Others' Backs :66:64:69:60:68

Telling Bad/False Stories **:63:64:72:68:62: Chi Square (4) = 14.11, p=.007

Gossiping :61:64:55:57:55

Shutting Others Out *:56:54:56:55:60: Chi Square (4) =10.12, p<.05

Deliberately Not Inviting :48:42:56:43:39

Revealing Secrets :56:53:58:51:50

Deliberately Ignoring *:49:47:54:50:53: Chi Square (4) = 9.61, p<.05

Telling Others Not to Be With Certain Girls (Excluding) :47:41:50:37:38

p<.05 * p<.01** p<.001*** For Whole Sample

Discussion

Girls' Understanding of the Concept of Bullying.

Unlike previous studies on bullying, this study selected a girl only population, and all questions in the survey related to activities that occur specifically between girls. Rather than present girls with a definition of bullying, as has been done in the past, this study presented girls with a series of choices, thus enabling them to indicate which of the factors were relevant to them. Past research definitions have focused on direct, overt behaviours which girls have not necessarily engaged in, nor related to and thus girls appear to

have been under-represented in the bullying literature. By subdividing the key issues, a clearer picture regarding girls' perceptions of bullying emerges.

With regard to their understanding of the concept of bullying, girls in this study have demonstrated that their perceptions of bullying are consistent with previous research. They clearly understand that bullying is about deliberate intent to harm; involves two parties of unequal status/power and is not an isolated incident, but occurs repeatedly. The finding of no difference between primary and secondary students in their understanding, supports the view that there is a common understanding of this phenomenon.

That girls did not determined bullying to be always about these issues raises some interesting questions, however. By responding that bullying was often about these issues, rather than always, it begs the question....what else is bullying about for girls? If it is not always about intent to harm, what is the intent? If it not always about power imbalances, is it about struggles for power between similar status girls? If it is not always repeated and continued over time, does it only last for the life of the struggle? Continued investigations into girls' perceptions and understanding of the concept of bullying are thus required.

Girls' Understanding of the Nature of Bullying:

With regard to the nature of bullying, the mean responses reveal a picture which indicates that amongst girls, bullying is often psychological ; sometimes verbal; and never physical. These findings are consistent with recent research into aggression, which suggest that girls are aggressive, but are more likely to use more subtle and covert means. Given that earlier research emphasised the more overt, physical bullying behaviours, and did not address the more covert, psychological

modes of aggressing, it is not surprising that girls were initially considered to be less involved in bullying.

Girls in this study have articulated that their understanding of bullying revolves around deliberate intent to harm, power differences and repeated negativity that goes on over time and that it is more often psychological in nature. Given this, the structure of girls' friendships would appear to be of importance in that it allows girls to employ these methods.

Girls' friendships are predominantly tight dyads operating within larger cliques, which promote exclusivity, intimacy and disclosure. Within the safety of a friendship, girls often reveal intimate secrets to each other, which assist in the bonding of the relationship. Because girls self-disclose more readily to their friends, they may then be more vulnerable to abuse when the relationship breaks down. Intimate secrets, once part of the language of friendship, when deliberately and maliciously revealed to others with the express intent to harm, become the weapon to be used against the former friend, exposing the girl to teasing, ridicule and rejection. A relationship which was once equal in terms of power and status, thus becomes unbalanced, with one girl gathering support from others, whilst the other is rejected, ostracised and excluded.

The structure and nature of girls' friendships thus provides the vehicle for bullying when a relationship breaks down, in that they enable the power balance to become one-sided and allow for ongoing manipulation and negativity by rallying others to assist and take sides.

Girls' Perceptions of Direct Physical Behaviours As Bullying Behaviours

Direct physically aggressive behaviours: such as hitting; kicking; pinching; punching; and demanding money or valuables; reflect the types

of behaviours generally addressed in earlier studies and represent the stereotypical view of bullying as being an overt, aggressive act involving physical intimidation of a weaker individual. That girls in this study clearly accept these to be bullying behaviours, reflects their belief in and acceptance of the stereotype: bullies are dominant, overt, physical and hurtful.

Girls in this study have articulated that bullying between girls is never physical, thus, whilst acknowledging that direct physical behaviours represent bullying behaviours, they are indicating that they do not represent activities in which they usually engage. This is not to say that physically aggressive acts do not occur between girls, for they do, but these results indicate that they are not indicative of girls' bullying behaviours. In earlier research, girls were not given the opportunity to articulate their perceptions of these behaviours. They were simply asked whether or not they bullied others in these ways. Their negative responses consequently generally reflected and supported the perceived gender differences which existed at the time: boys were the bullies, and girls were not! It is little wonder that girls did not have a high "bullying profile" in the earlier research.

Girls' Perceptions Of Direct Verbal Behaviours as Bullying

The direct verbal behaviours: teasing; hassling; name calling; criticising others' appearances; do however reflect activities in which girls engage, and prior research has indicated that both girls and boys are involved in these activities to a similar extent. These behaviours have often been associated with girls being bitchy, however, by asserting that these are bullying behaviours, girls in this study are elevating them beyond this. They are suggesting that these behaviours are not trivial, but are deliberate attacks designed to harm; to put others down; to intimidate and control and are not one-off events. These direct verbal behaviours appear to be the tools girls use to assert their power, dominance and control over others. Girls do not

need to use physical force to assert themselves, when they can use their knowledge of secrets as the language of power to attack and mobilise others from a position of superior power or strength. As part of this ongoing research, further investigation of the sociometric status of the girls should reveal further information regarding their perceptions of these behaviours. Controversial, popular and rejected status girls may shed more light on girls' perceptions of these and the other behaviours being examined.

Girls' perceptions of Indirect Aggressive Behaviours as Bullying Behaviours

The following Indirect behaviours: spreading rumours; writing nasty notes; telling bad/false stories; saying bad things behind their backs; gossiping; shutting others out of the group; and deliberately not inviting others to parties; are perceived to be bullying behaviours by girls in this study. According to their understand of the concept and nature of bullying then, they are suggesting that these are deliberate, intentionally harmful, repeated activities which make use of power differentials between the girls; are generally not physical acts, are sometimes verbal but more often psychological in design. They are therefore not activities to be trivialised or ignored in our schools.

These behaviours are not just girls being bitchy towards each other, as has often been implied. Bitchiness implies nastiness, negativity, spite, complaining about and fault finding in others, and is certainly unpleasant, but does not imply oppression of others, dominance and control, and deliberate intent to harm.

Unlike direct behaviours, indirect activities specifically involve the use of other girls and are designed to alienate and harm victims without the perpetrator being easily identified. This negative social manipulation, which involves rallying and mobilising others into support against another girl/s, deflects the attention away from the initiator, thus allowing her to remain unidentified. As others become

involved, her aggression, her involvement, and her intent become effectively disguised. This then enables the protagonist's reputation to remain unsullied, which is important for her in terms of her ongoing status and popularity with the peer group and even her reputation with the teacher.

Because these indirect behaviours are more difficult to observe, and are more covert they thus allow the perpetrator to disguise and conceal her aggression and intent. It is little wonder that earlier studies into bullying behaviours, which focused on overt, direct, mostly physical acts, did not pick up on these activities which appear to be related specifically to girls. Whilst the assumption has been made in recent times that these behaviours are used by girls to bully others, this study is the first which articulates girls' perceptions of these activities.

The only behaviour declared definitely to NOT be bullying:
telling others to not be with certain girls (excluding)
is a surprising result and raises questions regarding the purpose of this activity.

Girls in this study have indicated that this particular activity, of manipulating and rallying others, of mobilising them to exclude another girl/s does not meet the requirements of their understanding of bullying behaviour. Anecdotal evidence, however, from teachers, parents and girls, suggests that exclusion is one of the main negative behaviours in which girls engage, and is one of the most hurtful.

In light of our knowledge of the exclusivity, intensity and intimacy of girl's friendships, it could be that the intention of telling others not to be with certain girls, or exclusion, is not to aggress, but is

to defend that which already exists: the status quo; the existing relationship, or clique, which is perceived to be under threat from other girls. Girls would be unlikely to construe this as an aggressive or indeed bullying behaviour, then, if the intention of it is not to harm.

Girls jealously guard their friendships, and select who is accepted or not into the inner sanctum. Therefore, in order to protect and maintain their important mutual friendships from interference by others who may want "to take friends away", girls may purposefully, indirectly and often via a third party, manipulate, ostracise and victimize others. Here the intent is perceived as a positive action: to preserve that which already exists; to defend the existing relationship against all comers. Thus, whilst employing aggressive strategies, girls' motives for doing so are, for their purposes, positive. This may account for girls saying that they didn't mean to hurt anyone when questioned about these behaviours. Certainly, they meant to exclude, ostracise and reject, but their reason for doing so was prompted by the need to preserve what they had and what was important to them.

When a friendship breaks down, however, girls no longer want to protect it. If they feel that they have been unfairly dealt with by another girl/s they want retaliation. They want to rally others to their point of view, take their side, thus gathering support and ostracising the target girl. They want to intimidate and exert power, dominance and control now for a different reason: their intent is negative: they mean to harm the target girl.

It would seem then, that there might be two issues working in concert here. Indirect strategies, but exclusion in particular, may be employed in two different ways, each involving a different intention. To date, these strategies have only been associated with aggression, but this study suggests that they may serve a dual function:

* a specific intent to aggress against others, perhaps in retaliation; and

• a specific intent to protect and defend important friendships and relationships from outsiders.

Exclusivity, intensity, intimacy and disclosure, those aspects of girls' friendships which provide safety and security to the friendship, would seem therefore to provide a structure for indirect activities which can serve a dual purpose:

• in order to preserve and safeguard existing relationships girls seemingly aggress by rejecting, ostracising and excluding others, and

• to deliberately aggress, in order to retaliate and exert dominance and control.

Two activities in particular: revealing others' secrets and deliberately ignoring others; revealed no significant differences, with almost half of the girls suggesting that they were bullying, and half reporting that they were not. These behaviours appear to provide support that there might be reasons other than bullying for girls using these behaviours. If one's intent were to protect a friendship or relationship, engaging in both of these behaviours would be an effective means of keeping others away.

Examination of the indirect behaviours perceived to be bullying, suggests that, whilst significantly more girls reported that they were bullying behaviours, many girls did not think that they were. Whereas the data for direct physical and direct verbal behaviours being bullying behaviours is much more clearly defined, with up to 85% of the girls indicating that they were bullying behaviours, the indirect behaviours presented some unsurety. Some activities resulted in up to 45% of the girls suggesting that they were not bullying. This indicates that these behaviours might serve another purpose as well as bullying. It also suggests that these behaviours might be more important at different year levels.

The findings of this study suggest that indirect behaviours, whilst

considered bullying when the intention is to harm, may be perceived entirely differently should the intent be something else. If the intent to harm is deliberate, then these behaviours are designed to be aggressive. Where the intent, however, is not to harm, but is to protect the existing relationship, or to preserve the status quo, then it would seem unlikely that girls would perceive them to be aggressive.

Indirect behaviours then, are powerful tools available to girls which serve dual purposes. The implications of these findings for schools is that not all girls may respond to interventions aimed at reducing these behaviours if the girls themselves do not perceive that they are engaging in negative, aggressive activities.

Age Related Trends:

These results indicate the girls' perceptions of indirect aggressive behaviours changed over time, thus providing support for previous research. Rigby, (1996) reported that bullying peaked around the beginning of secondary school and was followed by a decline over the next couple of years. Bjorqvist et al (1992; p126) in their studies of indirect aggression, reported that of three age groups examined: 8yrs; 11yrs; 15yrs; "aggressive behaviour has its highest "peak" at age 11" and Crick, Bigbee and Howes (1996) reported that relational aggression was viewed as a more normative angry behaviour by older girls, compared with younger girls (p1007) where her sample focused on ages 9-12.

As more girls in Year 8 reported that spreading rumours; writing nasty notes; telling bad/false stories; and deliberately ignoring others were bullying behaviours than in other years, there are clear implications for schools. The transition from primary to secondary school is a time of rapid emotional, physical and psychological growth and development. Girls may be particularly sensitive to these behaviours at this time, or they may be more socially intelligent and thus more adept at using these behaviours in the negative, harmful manner.

Shutting Others Out was perceived by more Year 10s to be bullying, indicating that this behaviour may have more valence in these years as a bullying activity than in earlier years.

Taken together, these findings suggest that over time, girls' views of indirect aggressive behaviours as bullying behaviours change and that these behaviours may be more impactful at different times, or are employed more negatively at different times.

In sum, then, this study sheds new light on girls' bullying behaviours by allowing the girls themselves to articulate their perceptions of indirect aggressive behaviours as bullying behaviours. Findings suggest that indirect behaviours may serve a dual purpose. Where the intent to harm is evident, then they are considered to be intentionally aggressive. Where the added dimensions of a power imbalance and repeated negativity are present, then they can be construed as bullying behaviours. Where girls do not perceive that they are bullying behaviours, however, raises the suggestion that these behaviours can serve different purposes. Where the intent is to protect, defend or preserve existing friendships or relationships, then these behaviours may in fact be construed as positive defensive mechanisms which keep others away from the important friendship/relationship.

This paper has focused on indirect aggression, but mention needs to be made concerning the implications these findings may have for relational aggression.

Whilst both make use of the peer network, and imcorporate similar behaviours, indirect aggressive behaviours suggest that a third party must be engaged or other girls must be mobilised and rallied in support, with attention thus deflected away from the protagonist. One of its purposes therefore seems to be to disguise the perpetrator's

role in the action. This study has also suggested that these behaviours may not necessarily be perceived as aggressive, and subsequently bullying either, if the intent is perceived to be protective of existing relationships.

Relational aggression, with its intent defined as being purposeful damage of the child's peer relationships, implies that the girls always have a negative intent, and are deliberately being aggressive. Relational aggression also seems to imply that the behaviours can be both direct (You can't play!) or indirect (Spreading rumours). With direct relationally aggressive behaviours, the purpose is clear, and the protagonist is readily identifiable. With indirect relationally aggressive behaviours, the findings from this study, suggests that there may be two different motivations and intentions of the behaviour: to protect or defend an existing friendship/relationship; and to deliberately aggress. If this is the case, then these indirect behaviours cannot always be assumed to be aggressive, and thus can not be considered to be bullying.

References:

Adler, P.A., Kless, S.J. & and Adler, P. (1992) Socialisation to gender roles: popularity among elementary school boys and girls. Sociology of Education, 65:169-187.

Asher (1990) Recent Advances in the study of peer rejection. In S.R. Asher and J.D. Coie (Eds) Peer rejection in childhood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Asher and Dodge (1986) Identifying children who are rejected by their

peers. Developmental Psychology, 22 (4):444-449.

Bjorqvist, K., Lagerspetz, K.M.J. and Osterman, K. (1992)The direct and indirect aggression scales. Vasa, Finland: Abo Akademi University, Department of Social Sciences.

Bjorqvist, K., Ostermann, K. and Kaukiainen, A. (1992) The development of direct and indirect aggressive strategies in males and females. In K. Bjorqvist and P. Niemela, (Eds.) Of mice and women. Aspects of female aggression. San Diego: Academic Press.

Bjorqvist, K. (1994) Sex differences in physical, verbal and indirect aggression: A review of recent research. Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 30: 177-188.

Block, J.H. (1993) Diffferential premises arising from differential socialisation of the sexes: Some conjectures. Child Development, 54: 1335-1354.

Bukowski, W.M. and Hoza, B. (1989) Popularity and friendship: Issues in theory, measurement and outcome. In T.J. Berndt & G.W. Ladd (Eds), Peer relationships in child development . New York: Wiley.

Bukowski, W.M, Hoza, B. and Boivin, M. (1993) Popularity, friendship and emotional adjustment during early adolescence: The development and psychometric properties of the friendship qualities scale. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 11: 471-484

Buss, (1961)The psychology of aggression. New York: Wiley.

Coie, J.D., Dodge, K.A. & and Coppotelli, H. (1982) Dimensions and types of social status: A cross-age perspective. Developmental Psychology. 18 (4):557-570.

Crick, N., Bigbee, M.A. and Howes, C. (1996) Gender differences in children's normative beliefs about aggression: How do I hurt thee? Let me count the ways. Child Development, 67:1003-1014.

Crick, N. and Grotpeter, J. (1995) Relational aggression, gender and social-psychological adjustment. Child Development, 66: 710-722.

Dodge, K. A., Coie, J.D., Pettit, G.S. and Price, J.M. (1990) Peer status and aggression in boys groups. Developmental and contextual analyses.Child Development, 61: 1289-1309.

Eder, D. and Hallinan, M.T. (1978) Sex differences in children's friendships. American Sociological Review 43: 237-250.

Erwin, P. (1993) Friendship and peer relations in children. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

Feshbach, N.D. (1969) Sex differences in children's modes of aggressive responses towards outsiders. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 15: 249-258.

Kupersmidt, Coie and Dodge, 1990 The role of poor peer relationships in the development of disorder. In S.R. Asher & J.D.Coie (eds.) Peer rejection in childhood (pp 274-303). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lagerspetz, K.M., Bjorqvist, K. and Peltonen, T. (1988) Is indirect aggression more typical of females? Gender differences in

aggressiveness in 11 and 12-year old children. Aggressive Behavior, 14: 403-414.

Maccoby, E.E.(1990) Gender and relationships. American Psychologist, 45 (4): 513-520.

Maccoby, E.E. and Jacklin, C.N. (1974) The psychology of sex differences. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Masten, A.S., Morison, P and Pelligrini, D.S. (1985) A revised class play method of peer assessment. Developmental Psychology 21 (3): 523-533.

Olweus, D. (1978) Aggression in schools: Bullies and whipping boys. New York: Halstead.

Olweus, D. (1991) Victimization among school children. In R. Baenniger Targets of violence and aggression. Amsterdam:North-Holland.

Owens, L. D. and MacMullin C.E.(1995) Gender differences in aggression in children in South Australian Schools. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth. 6:21-35.

Parke, R.D. and Slaby, R.G. (1993) The development of aggression. In E.M. Hetherington (Ed.) P.H. Mussen (Series Ed.), Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialisation, personality and social development (pp 547-642). New York: Wiley.

Parker, J.G. and Asher, S.R. (1987) Peer acceptance and later personal adjustment: Are low accepted children "at risk"? Psychological Bulletin, 102: 357-389.

Parker, J.G. and Asher, S.R. (1993) Friendship and friendship quality in middle childhood: Links with peer group acceptance and feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction. Developmental Psychology, 29: 611-621.

Rigby, K. (1996) Bullying in schools and what to do about it. Melbourne: ACER.

Rigby, K. (1994) School Bullies. Independent Teacher, April: 8-9.

Rigby, K. and Slee, P.T. (1995) Manual for the peer relations questionnaire. Underdale: University of South Australia.

Siann, S.,Callaghan, M., Glissov, P., Lockhart, R. and Rawson, L. (1994) Bullying: teachers' views and school effects. Educational Studies, 19 (3): 307-321.

Smith, P. K. (1991) The silent nightmare: Bulling and victimisation in school peer groups. The Psychologist, 4: 243-248.

Slee, P.T. (1993) Bullying at school: It's hard not to feel helpless. Children Australia, 18 (4):14-16.

Tattum, D.(1989) Violence and aggression in schools. In D.Tattum and D. Lane (eds.) Bullying in Schools. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Thorne, B. (19.3) Gender play: Girls and boys in school. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Windle, M. (1994) A study of friendship characteristics and problem behaviours among middle adolescents. Child Development 65: 1764-1777.